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BY

GEORGE BLACK

# ROBERT BURNS.

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W. DYMCK,  
BOOK ARCADE.

1901.

428 GEORGE ST.,  
SYDNEY.



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To Hugh Wright  
from

George Black

1st January 1904.







ROBERT BURNS,

FROM SKIRVING'S PORTRAIT.



IN  
DEFENCE OF ROBERT  
BURNS.

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THE CHARGE OF PLAGIARISM  
CONFUTED.

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BY  
GEORGE BLACK.

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I had a wish—I mind its power,  
A wish that to my latest hour  
Shall strongly heave my breist—  
That I, for puir auld Scotia's sake,  
Some useful plan or buke could make,  
Or sing a song at least.  
From rough burr-thistle, spreading wide  
Among the bearded bear,  
I turned the weeder-clips aside,  
An' spared the symbol dear.

—Burns.

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W. DYMOCK,  
BOOK ARCADE,  
GEORGE STREET,  
SYDNEY.

1901.



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## PREFACE.

THE contents of this pamphlet appeared in the *Bulletin* on 5th and 19th February, 1898, in reply to two articles purporting to be reviews of Henley & Henderson's edition of Burns' works, which had appeared in that journal on 23rd October and 4th December, 1897. The *Bulletin's* replies to my trenchant criticism were not in my opinion, nor in that of any others qualified to decide, so far as I can learn, equal to the occasion. One, dated March 12th, amounted to this: It is true that we have maligned Burns but then he is dead and reply from him is impossible. But the living ought to be complimentary to one another, especially where literary matters are concerned. If that be impossible, let us talk about the weather and the beauty of moonlight among the peaks and gorges of the Blue Mountains.

This volume only contains as much of the original articles as is now necessary for my purpose, and these have been extended and amplified in several directions.

With those who say the works of Burns are his best defence, I am in perfect agreement. At the same time, one may be pardoned for defending the mighty monument he has raised, to the lasting perpetuation of his own memory and the literature of his country, from the defilements of the nought-respecting pariah dogs of journalism.

GEORGE BLACK.

Sydney, 1901.



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## CHAPTER I.

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### ON PLAGIARISM AND SOME PLAGIARISTS.

Burns, a Scotch peasant, “with a soul like an æolian harp, in whose strings the vulgar wind as it passed through, changed itself into articulate melody,” may with justice, as a singer, be said to need no defence. Nor does he—from those who know him. With most Australians, however, he is little more than a tradition, while the *Bulletin* is a living force whose most reckless assertions are usually accepted as gospel truths. It was necessary, therefore, that the sludge should be removed which was locally deposited on his name and fame by the overflow of that journal. No one intervening, I felt impelled to see what personally could be done. Loath to engage in controversy, it could not longer be evaded.

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Condensed, the *Bulletin's* arguments were these: (1) That Burns, for his own uses, stole the ideas, and even words, of preceding writers; (2) That his countrymen, or the bulk of them, are wholly unaware of this alleged fact. Quotation will prove the verity

of this synopsis. They said : ‘ Nearly all that is best in the songs of Burns never belonged to Burns at all. . . . Burns, the songster, was an inspired vamped, mender, tinker, and little more.’ The idea presented in the second statement permeated both *Bulletin* articles, and is most forcibly stated in the following sentence : ‘ The average Scotchman does not know how good or how bad Burns’ verses are, and he does not know how much Burns plagiarised.’ All this in conjunction with much vulgar railing at Scotchmen in the aggregate—their lofty notions of Burns, their meanness, their lack of humour, their love of whisky, and so on.

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For the charge that Burns’ countrymen were and are misled as to his sources of inspiration—the Scots of his day could not be so misguided. The songs, 184 in number, which he collected, and made printable for Johnson’s Musical Museum (of which he was practically the editor), and those, in number 90, which he similarly furnished to Thomson’s Collection of Original Scottish Airs, were in common use at the time. He distinguished between his own compositions and the works he repaired by appending his initials to the former and Z to the latter. Had he claimed aught not rightfully his, it is one of the curiosities of literature that he was not exposed by his contemporaries. Had there been grounds for charges, these would have then been made. As half



of Burns' work was published posthumously and one-third of it without his commands, it is not surprising that some verses, mostly inferior, have been improperly issued behind his name by catch-penny publishers of little-regarded and now almost obsolete editions. This is true of almost every voluminous bygone poet. But the ancients had no misconceptions regarding Burns. It is a fact, historically recorded, that the plough-boys and maid-servants of his day went without clothing they needed badly in order to procure his works. As for the alleged ignorance of the moderns—I know personally that the average Scotch man and lad, of from 25 to 35 years ago, knew just exactly what was Burns and what was not. The Kilmarnock, McCreery and Creech, Currie, Cunningham, Stewart, Chambers, Aldine, and Nimmo editions, with explanatory notes, and 150 others almost as reliable, with the letters to Johnson and Thomson, were open to them. Many hundred editions of Burns have been published in Great Britain, besides those of American issue, and at least two-thirds of these contain copious notes. I refuse to believe that the Scot of to-day, with his wider education, is more ignorant of his country's literature than was his father 30 years back.

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As for the plagiarism : If “the average Scotch man does not know how much Burns plagiarised,” it is simply because Burns was not a plagiarist. The Scots' song, like the Scots' ballad, was the product

of no one man's hand ; nay, of no one generation ; nay, of no one century. It travelled from mouth to mouth, from heart to heart, from age to age ; losing somewhat at times, but on the whole gaining flavor with years and much journeying. Its users had no fear of being dubbed plagiarists, and they culled the fittest ideas and images as they traversed the hedgerows of poesy, caring not whence the root. Burns, by his genius, saved this mass of folk lore, drifting idly to and fro, from the oblivion which at length would have overtaken it. He took the rude or impure songs of his day—the namelessness of whose authors he bewailed—and the fragmentary snatches which floated from mouth to mouth at fair and market, and made them a part of literature, saved them from certain annihilation. Many hundreds of songs, some by his contemporaries, put into print by his endeavors, owe little or nothing to his hand, and have rarely been published with his works, or credited to him, save by the ignorant—among whom may be classed the *Bulletin*. Let the fair-minded read his correspondence and doubt, if they can, that his desire was to enrich Scots literature by saving many fine songs from oblivion and by developing or polishing the many floating fragments which lived chiefly in the memory of a passing generation, rather than to augment his reputation by association with these musical collections. This is made the more evident if it be remembered that the poet indignantly refused remuneration for his priceless

work. He also rescued from certain destruction many of the tunes without words composed or circulated by the wandering minstrels of his time, and immortalised them by wedding thereto appropriate language. Of intent, he hid nought. He acknowledged the sources of a phrase, a line, a title, a chorus, a stanza, a tune, on which he had built up a complete structure of song. To me, the finest trait in his character is the unselfish enthusiasm he gave to this work. His countrymen know what he did—without fee or reward, at the cost of health and prosperity—for Scottish song literature, and are grateful. In moments of exhilaration, some may have styled him the greatest poet that ever lived—I have heard similar Australian estimates of Gordon—but that provides no excuse for the persistence of the *Bulletin's* attempts to depose him wholly from their hearts. Burns is not so easily to be set aside: those who best know him can most easily despise and disregard the littleness which joys to think that Henley is the promulgator of a damaging doctrine concerning the dead poet. But Henley has no illusions on the subject. He declares that Burns has made “a notable and lasting contribution to literature.”

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Let me recapitulate: Burns' reputation, according to acknowledged authorities, is mainly based on his Poems and his Satires. They assert, nevertheless, that he lifts his head, high as the tuneful morning stars, among the world's song-writers, on the footing

of lyrics indisputably his. Here the worm that bores into reputations gets a chance. Burns, purely for love of country, allied to love of song, and never for love of lucre, endeavored to enrich her minstrelsy by collecting for publication the old ballads that ran like fire along the country-side at merry-making times. Some, wedded to beautiful airs, were unprintable; these he re-wrote. Others, word-perfect, were twined with poor melodies; for these he found fresh music. In other cases, a felicitous phrase, line, or verse was embedded in a mass of vulgar verbiage. Burns liberated the gem, polished it, and set it in a circlet of equally-rare jewels. He did more—in every case he forwarded copies of the originals with his versions to the publishers. Since his day, unscrupulous men have traded on his name, and published editions which contained songs he never wrote and never claimed. This caused a confusion which was increased by the fact that Hogg, Cunningham, Stenhouse, Buchan, Hamilton, and others were so regardless of Burns' reputation as to forge 'originals' to songs that were undeniably his. By the way, instead of taking away from Burns, Henley has actually restored to him songs which were wrested from him by these forgeries. For instance, *It was a'for our Rightful King*—written by Burns for the *Musical Museum*. It was unsigned, and Sir Walter Scott gave it a Jacobite parentage, which it enjoyed until Henley made clear Burns' claim to its fatherhood. How many more

of these so-called Burns' 'originals' are forged? Had Australia possessed an unwritten song-literature, how highly would the poet have been extolled who played towards it the part of a Burns, and rescued it from extinction. But how does the *Bulletin* reward Burns for this great mass of laborious and gratuitous service to Scots', nay, to universal literature? He is treated like a detected thief; he is denied originality; he has done little, says Red Page, but milk other men's cows into his own bucket. But the reviewer's bucket contained no milk; it was full, to overflowing, with gall. Otherwise, a dead man would not be styled a thief, because he posthumously had an occasional rogue for publisher. So far as I know, Shakespeare has not been accused of theft because Marlowe's beautiful *Come live with me and be my Love* is at times bound with his works,

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The narrowness of vision, which views Burns through the spectacles of to-day rather than through the media of his own time, is surprising. His influence on succeeding literature is forgotten; the fact that millions have re-echoed his sentiments is not recognised. He is 'very commonplace,' says the *Bulletin*—attempting to evade the commonplace by being inaccurate, eccentric, and grotesque. But was he commonplace in his day and generation? Would many of his opinions be commonplace, had he never lived? Was he not, so far from being commonplace,

on the contrary, in Britain the pioneer of outspoken thought and simplicity of style? As a matter of most notorious fact did he not revolutionise English literature, and banish the artificial in thought and language into the limbo of forgetfulness? A hundred years or more ahead of his time, when the *Bulletin* catches him up, he becomes 'commonplace!' That journal then babbles out: 'His homely verse suits homely minds.' His subjects were certainly homely: Domestic Joys and Sorrows; the Beauties of Nature; the Wrongs of Mankind; Peace and War; Politics and Religion; Love and Hate; Life and Death. What else, good Monsieur Frangipani, is there to write about? He is homely in the company of those who have always had first place in the hearts of the people. To them, it matters little how they may be regarded by cold-blooded cynics of the *nil admirari* school! Let these things be remembered: Robert Burns, for love, put new words to many blackguard Scotch, Highland, and Irish songs, or scraps of songs, in order to preserve what was loveable in them, and made full acknowledgement of indebtedness, where it existed. William Shakespeare, for personal profit, in order to fill his own coffers, without thought of service to letters, took the o'er-long rambling plays of his day and pruned them into proportion, and made no acknowledgment of his obligation to those who went before. Not one Englishman in 10,000 is aware of it, but no one heaves bricks at Shakespeare's tomb and calls

him ‘filcher’ in order to disabuse the ‘average’ Englishman of the idea that Shakespeare is the greatest poet that ever breathed. Shakespeare kept his own counsel as to his founts of inspiration—he is a god; Burns, who owned up, and whose so-called plagiarism is not a circumstance to that of the Bard of Avon, is a common literary thief! Further—Shakespeare is not accused of plagiarism because of acts done by his publishers; nor because of alterations, sometimes for the better, made by his many editors; nor because of emendations read into him by various actors, and afterwards generally adopted—such for instance as Colley Cibber’s “Off with his head! So much for Buckingham!” Nor because six inferior plays have been fathered on him—to wit: *The Arraignment of Paris*; *The Birth of Merlin*; *Edward III.*; *The Fair Emma*; *The Merry Devil of Edmon-ton*; and *Macedorus*—which were written by George Peeke and others. Nor is he accused of theft because *Titus Andronicus*—written by Marlowe almost for a certainty—is usually bound up with his works.

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Let me strengthen my disproof of the assertion that Burns was commonplace by placing in contrast to the peevish maunderings of the literary homunculus, who has attacked him, the weighty opinions of the great French critic — Taine. He hailed Burns as the founder of a new literary spirit; the foremost banner-bearer in the modern revolution of

letters. In his History of English Literature, he says :—

“ At last there started up an unfortunate ploughman (Burns) rebelling against the world, and in love ; with all the yearnings, lusts, greatness, and irrationality of modern genius. Now and then, driving his plough, he lighted on genuine verses—verses such as Heine and Alfred de Musset have made in our own days. *In those few words, combined after a new fashion, there was a revolution. Two hundred new verses sufficed. The human mind turned on its hinges, and so did civil society.* . . . With Burns rises a new ideal ; old narrow moralities are to give place to the wide sympathy of the modern man who loves the beautiful whenever it meets him. . . . *This originality and divining instinct exist in his style as in his ideas. The speciality of the age in which we live, and which he inaugurated, is to blot out rigid distinctions of class, catechism, and style : academic, moral, or social conventions are falling away, and we claim in society dominion for individual merit, in morality for inborn generosity, in literature for genuine feeling. Burns was the first to enter on this track, and he often pursues it to the end.* . . . For the first time man spoke as men speak, or rather as they think, without premeditation ; indifferent to rules, content to exhibit his feeling as it came to him, and as he felt it. At last, after so many years, we escape from measured declamation, we hear a man’s voice ! better, we forget the voice in the emotion which it expresses, we



feel this emotion reflected in ourselves, we enter into relations with a soul. Then form seems to fade away and disappear—this is the great feature of modern poetry. Burns has reached it seven or eight times. . . . *A sad life is most often the life of men in advance of their age ; it is not wholesome to go too quick. Burns was so much in advance that it took forty years to catch him.*"



## CHAPTER II.

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### THE CONVEYINGS OF SHAKESPEARE.

The *Bulletin* has made many very reckless assertions, but none to exceed one that occurred in an attempt at reply to me. Its slap-dash audacity is remarkable, even when its source is remembered Red Page—the plush-breeched flunkey of letters—then said: ‘So far as their borrowings are concerned, Burns, for the most part, gilded refined gold; Shakespeare made gold out of lead.’

Such ravings might convince the credulous or delude the ignorant; they cannot impose upon those accustomed to weigh words. In Burns, the use of ‘a lyrical idea, that is a rhythm, a burden, a drift,’ already utilised, constitutes ravishing, filching, clean-stealing, and a gilding of refined gold. Shakespeare gets different treatment. When he lifts, as he does almost without exception, his Plot, Situations, Characters, Colors, and Atmosphere, from the Gone-Before, he does not filch! Oh, no; he only turns lead into gold. The unprejudiced, those qualified to

judge, will agree with me that such plentiful machinery is at least as valuable as "a lyric idea," and that the plays of a dramatist thus equipped by his predecessors, are more than half-written. But the alchemy which enabled Shakespeare to turn lead into gold, did not end with his borrowing of crucibles for the melting, and moulds for the shaping of his precious ores. What shall be said of Sir Know-All with his prate about Shakespeare's transmutation of the base into the royal metal, if it be shown that the dramatist not only stole his apparatus, but also two-thirds of the golden coins he professedly minted. Unfortunately for me, Boswell's Shakespeare, with Edmund Malone's notes, is not accessible; nor yet the appendix to the Shakespeare Society's reprint of the 1802 edition, wherein the Sources of Shakespeare are very fully set out. But let me quote Emerson:—

Shakespeare esteemed the mass of old plays waste stock, in which any experiment might be freely tried. . . . He owed debts in all directions, and was able to use whatever he found. The amount of his indebtedness may be inferred from Malone's laborious computations in regard to the First, Second and Third parts of Henry VI., in which, says he, 'out of 6043 lines, 1771 were written by some author preceding Shakespeare; 2373 by him, on the foundations laid by his predecessors, and 1889 were entirely his own,' Malone's preceding investigations hardly leave a single drama of Shakespeare's absolute invention.

What of the lead now? Aye, and what of the gold? Go to, thou vain man, and learn, again from Emerson, that:—

Great men are more distinguished by range and extent than by originality. If we require in them the originality

which consists in weaving, like a spider, their web from their own bowels; or in finding clay and making bricks, and building the house; no great men are original. The greatest genius is the most indebted man. . . . Thought is the property of him who can entertain it.

Or from E. J. Benson, who, recently writing in the *Nineteenth Century*, said :—

The truth seems to be that unintelligent theft is plagiarism; critical theft is not inconsistent with the truest originality.

That was Emerson's apology for Shakespeare. It may serve in a lesser degree for Ben Jonson, who paraphrased *To Celia* and *Drink to Me* from the *Epistles of Philostratus*; for Herrick, who also borrowed from that Ancient; for Chaucer, whose obligations to Ovid, to Petrarch, to Boccaccio and to the French are obvious; also for Milton, whose *Comus* is largely indebted to *The Faithful Shepherdess* of Beaumont and Fletcher, whose *Il Penseroso* owed much to the *Address to Melancholy* in Francis Beaumont's *Passionate Madman*, whose conception of Satan is apparently derived from Marino's *Sospetto d' Herode*, and who also borrowed from Browne; it may also serve as an apology for every other English writer of eminence—including Tennyson, whose obligations to the classics are obvious. For who shall estimate what any modern owes to the past? Literature is a mass of stored impressions. The man whose impressions are all self-gathered is half informed. The wise glean experience side by side

with their study of the stores of the sages. Your hermit is the only original—when he can't read.

Concerning this matter of Shakespeare's plagiarism, Taine, after pointing out that at the age of 33 he bought a house, two barns, and two gardens, and went on accumulating, very pointedly says: "A man attains only to easy circumstances by his own labour; if he gains wealth it is by making others labor for him." In another place he writes: "Shakespeare set his wits to the *touching-up* of plays with so much activity that Greene called him 'an upstart crow beautified with our feathers.' "

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Hazlitt remarked that Homer appears the most original of writers, probably for the reason that we can trace literature no further, and yet it is said that in the Iliad he employed all the folk legends of his day. The sources of Shakespeare's borrowings are, however, well-known. He was so far from transmuting lead into gold that some of his literary commandeering is so clumsily done that his plays teem with absurdities of the most glowing character. Lions roar in French forests; English rustics disport themselves in Norman and Italian fields; Bohemia boasts of a sea coast; and Southern Italy has acquired an English winter—all because he stole widely and often used ignorantly. Here let it be remembered that Shakespeare (1564-1616) took the plot and incidents of *The Taming of The Shrew*

(1596) from *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594), and some of the circumstances from George Gascoigne's translation of Ariosto's comedy *The Supposes*, published in 1566. *Romeo and Juliet* (1596) is more original, but, copied by one Italian writer from another, and thence transplanted into a French tale by Pierre Boistean, it found its way into English in 1562 by means of Arthur Brooke's lengthy poem, *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet*. *King John* (1596-8) was founded on a drama called *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*, and this is said to have been founded on a much older play. *All's Well That Ends Well* (1598) came to Shakespeare from Boccaccio through a novel in *Painter's Palace of Pleasure*, named *Giletta of Narbona* (1566), and partly from an anonymous drama (1590). The plot of *As You Like It* (1599) and some incidents were taken from Lodge's *Rosalynd*. The central incident of *Much Ado About Nothing* (1600) appears to have travelled to Shakespeare from Ariosto's *Ginevra* and *Orlando Furioso*, through the novels of Bandello, thence to Belleforest's *Cent Histoires Tragiques* (1583), of which an English translation gave the Swan of Avon his cue. *Hamlet* sprang originally from a Scandinavian tradition into the chronicles of Saxo Grammaticus (1204), thence it was drawn for the plot of a novel by Belleforest in the latter half of the sixteenth century, thence it was translated into English under the title of the *Historie of Hamblett*, and was

at a later date dramatised by one whom Malone styles Thomas Kyd.

On this deeply-laid, ancient foundation, Shakespeare built up his wonderful tragedy. Henry V. was also based by Shakespeare on the plot and incidents of an older play. Twelfth Night resembles the thirtieth story in the second part of Bandello's novels, but Shakespeare apparently took the plot and some of the incidents from the Historie of Apolonius and Sylla in Rich's Farewell to Military Profession. The materials for Troilus and Cressida were drawn from Caxton's Recuyel of the Histories of Troy, and from Chaucer's Troilus and Cresseide, and much of his classic lore, where correct, has been gleaned from Chapman's translation of the Iliad. The plot and principal characters in Measure for Measure were lifted holus-bolus from George Whetstone's Promos and Cassandra. For Othello, Shakespeare took the plot and incidents from the 7th novel of the 3rd decade of Cinthio's Hecatommithi, whence, it is said by Dunlop, *the characters of Desdemona, Iago, and Cassio were taken with scarcely a shade of difference*—which act of appropriation does not seem to be precisely described by the *Bulletin's* phrase concerning the turning of borrowed lead into gold. Shakespeare's King Lear (1605) was constructed mainly of materials found in a play styled The True Chronicle of King Leare and his Three Daughters—entered at Stationer's Hall in 1594—and in an old ballad written on the same subject,

while Augustine Skottowe asserts that the characters of Gloster and Edgar were taken from the tale of the Paphlagonian King in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. The song of the witches around the cauldron in *Macbeth* was transplanted bodily from the incantations of Thos. Middleton's (1570-1627) *Witch*, from which play Shakespeare is said to have borrowed the supernatural machinery, some incidents, and even speeches. Doubtless he used them more effectively than did his talented contemporary, but he appears to have filched largely all the same. The plot, incidents, and some of the principal speeches in *Coriolanus* were cribbed by Shakespeare from Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch, which supplied the two principal incidents for *Julius Cæsar*, and several situations for *Henry V.*, *Henry VI.*, and *Henry VIII.*, also for the latter the character of *Wolsey*. In other respects these historical plays, like *King John*, are very largely furbishments of much older plays current in Shakespeare's day, as the variations of style go to prove. *Timon of Athens* (1610) was a mosaic from *Painter's Palace of Pleasures* (1566), an anonymous drama (1590), North's translation of Plutarch, and a translation of Lucian. *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*—originally named after *Pyrocles*, the hero of Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*—was dug out of Gower's romance. The *Comedy of Errors* borrowed its plot from a translation of *Plautus' Manæchmi*—Shakespeare went frequently to *Plautus* for ideas! In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare



was indebted to Plutarch. The Winter's Tale is taken, with some alterations, from Robert Greene's Dorastus and Fawnia. The style and method of Shakespeare's historical plays, especially Richard III., according to Swinburne, are modelled without doubt on the Edward II. of Christopher Marlowe, but fail to reach "the highest height of the earlier master." Swinburne evidently does not believe that Shakespeare invariably "made gold out of lead!" And so on through the Shakesperean gallery. Can it be wondered that Nathan Dole, a contemporary of his, spake concerning "Such high-handed rapine as Shakespeare displayed toward the predecessors whom he robbed to glorify." If a concrete example of Shakespeare's filching be asked for, contrast the following lines from Marlowe's Lust's Dominion:—"The cold hand of death hath thrust his icy fingers in my breast," with those from Shakespeare's King John:—"And none of you will bid the winter come to thrust his icy fingers in my maw." This is what the *Bulletin's* half-read reviewer styles "turning lead into gold." None but he, dishonestly intent on finding exoneration somehow from the false position in which his ignorance, bigotry, and lack of fairness placed him, will be likely to imagine that Shakespeare mined for lead only in the writings of Boccaccio, Plutarch, Sidney, Marlowe, Middleton, Greene; Chaucer, Ariosto, Bandello, Cinthio, and others—his predecessors or contemporaries. But the man, who, dying in his thirty-seventh year, had ere then revived

a literature already moribund and resurrected a language which considered as literature was practically entombed, is his own best defender. It can never be forgotten that Burns, the precursor of Cowper, Crabbe, and Wordsworth, and the avowed inspirer of the latter, burst the bonds of his time by abandoning the false and artificial and returning to the natural and the true. And it might also be remembered that tho' Shakespeare, ere entering on his thirty-seventh year, had written some remarkable plays, that nevertheless the bulk of his work up to that time had been weak, vulgar, crude, hasty—and “in the jigging veins of rhyming mother wits”—as compared with the even excellence of his later years, and that had he then died his greater glories would have perished, as do frost-nipped buds ere opening. But let it also be remembered that what Henley said of Burns is also true of Shakespeare—“Being a great artist, he derived from a numerous ancestry.”



## CHAPTER III.

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### SOME BULLETIN BLUNDERS.

Someone has wisely said : — “ Every writer, great or small, unless he can clearly or definitely remember, or absolutely and entirely forget, all that he has ever read, must sometimes use the phrases and ideas of other people.” Feeling that this is true, and believing in addition that literature, written and unwritten, is a common possession, I make no attack on those who have borrowed to better and owned up. I simply expose some noted appropriators who made no acknowledgement, in order to show how unjustly Burns, who did acknowledge, has been treated by the bigoted, half-read, and imperfectly understanding. I think it is Hazlitt who speaks with enthusiasm of the art which is quick in admiration and ready in imitation, and yet so strong in its own instincts that it reconstructs and rearranges into harmony with its own thoughts every fragment which it borrows. Herein the song-writing methods of Burns are closely described, and

surely he was the most honest and open avower of literary obligation who ever lived. Continuing this line of thought, I might quote what Sir Frederick Bridge said recently of Handel, "who freely adopted and borrowed the music of other composers and held his tongue as to whence it came." For instance, the middle movement of *The Hallelujah Chorus* is taken from an Italian love song. For Israel in Egypt he lifted nine numbers, including some of the principal choruses, from a *Magnificat* by Erba—a Milanese composer—it is supposed, and found other materials elsewhere. The Conductor of the Royal Choral Society of London sees nothing discreditable in these and kindred circumstances, for Handel touched nought which was not thereby adorned. At the same time it was also said by Mr. A. J. Balfour that if Handel borrowed without acknowledgment, the act was not one of plagiarism—"on the contrary, Handel discovered the possibilities of a distinctly inferior work, and out of inferior material he made a star. Out of poor matter he produces what is of the first order; out of decaying matter he produces new, and by virtue of this he is a creator." How much less than Handel is Burns to be considered a plagiarist? How equally a creator? Acknowledging frankly his obligations, he re-created that which was on the verge of extinction, and turned base coin into medals of genius, fresh from his own mint, clear cut by his handiwork. He was inspired by the work of his predecessors, enthused by them—

does that make him a robber? Said Dean Swift : "I humbly conceive that though I light my candle at my neigh'bour's fire, that does not make the wick, the wax, or the flame less my own." Let me drive that home by a quotation from Mark Twain :—"No man produces an idea out of his own head. You cannot grow an idea—it first comes from the outside. Why Adam could not even invent the idea of modesty ; he went naked until he learned from the outside that to be naked was immodest. I have a sense of modesty, altho' Adam hadn't. But I inherited it ; I did not invent it." The *Bulletin's* reviewer appears to have been heir to nobody, to have inherited nothing—and most certainly neither sense, modesty, nor charity. He read into Burns all that he desired to see there, and then proceeded to slander him with all the malignance of a crabbed and contracted soul, worm-eaten with conceit of self. Before I proceed to wipe away his fly-specks from the pages of Burns by categorical disproof, let me deal with some incidental slanders.

The *Bulletin* critic's knowledge of Burns, outside of what he cribbed from Hazlitt, appears to have been derived solely from Henley, who is usually but not always accurate. But his knowledge of Henley was superficial ; there is nothing in literature and little in Henley to warrant this malignant accusation :—"Burns' friends and relations, with intent to heighten his reputation, deliberately destroyed many of the old ballads from which he borrowed."

These evil suspicionings of a jaundiced mind

could be used to tarnish the fame of any poet who ever breathed. Mrs. Burns actually disclaimed for her husband the authorship of many songs ; his brother, Gilbert, disowned the following :—As I was a Wandering ; The Winter it is Past ; A Bottle and a Friend ; The Battle of Sheriff-Muir, and other poems. But it is not for me to disprove such calumnious charges—the onus of proof rests with the slanderer. If idly made, we know how to estimate the circulator. Thus I challenged on two occasions, the Red Page, who, having first shut me out from further reply, then produced his authority :

“ In our Notes to individual songs, we have done our best to trace his—Burns’s—connexion with the past. This is now the more difficult because (1) much of the material he collected (including the origins of the publication known as *The Merry Muses* and a good deal else) has been destroyed—by his relations, or by Currie, or by later owners—in the interests partly of Scottish morals, partly of that cheap decorous chromolithograph (as it were) which bids fair to supplant the true Burns—ardent, impulsive, generous ; but hypochondriacal, passionate, imperfect—in the minds of his countrymen. . . .” —*Henley and Henderson’s ‘ Burns,’* vol. iii., page 296.

This, an indefinite statement, was garbled by the *Bulletin* into a direct charge. Henley did not know for certain, had no reason to suspect that any MS. verses which ever came into Burns’ hands, or ever met his eye, had ever been destroyed by any one before or after his death. But he was cursed with the disease he diagnoses in others—a desire to account for everything somehow. Therefore, if Burns’ relations did not destroy certain MS., Dr. Currie did, and if Currie did not, some unknown persons must have performed the horrid act of destruction. And

yet, I daresay in some quarters Henley is considered a man, and this is looked on as criticism. The poison-germs from Henley's slander-laden breath found congenial soil in the *Bulletin's* critic. There they developed largely; there were no "ors" or "buts" about him—"Burns' friends and relations, with intent to heighten his reputation, deliberately destroyed many of the old ballads from which he borrowed." And this person then complains that Henley did not go far enough in his denunciation of Burns, and goes himself so far beyond Henley that he need fear no one making that complaint of him.

But these high-minded gentlemen—whose concern for their own skins induces them to libel the dead rather than the living—know little of Burns. The *Merry Muses of Caledonia*, as Henley knows and avers, was a collection of bawdy Scotch songs made by Burns. It included several of his own compositions, among these latter being possibly a parody of John Anderson My Jo. Indeed it is stated that its second edition was wholly an effort of Burns' imagination. And so it may well be that many of his songs were written in two veins, and that the purer versions were not mere paraphrases of the impure but coeval with them. Holograph copies of *The Merry Muses* were sent by the poet to several friends, and one of them, after his death, came into the hands of a printer, who secretly circulated it. This is a matter of common literary notoriety. Copies were seen and commented on, by Dr. George Gilfillan,

Robert White, of Newcastle, J. G. Lockhart, and others. An MS. copy, whether complete or not I do not know, passed from the hands of Robert Cleghorn, a farmer, and Burns' friend, into the possession of John Allen, of Holland House, who, in 1813, lent it to Byron. On the authority of Lockhart, the songs, or some of them, were circulating in the London manuscript market in 1828. Therefore, if *The Merry Muses*, whether in print or manuscript, has utterly disappeared, one need not be very charitable to suppose that it was rather through the common misadventures to which the flimsiness and combustibility of paper render it subject, than by the agency of the long-dead Burns' jealous friends. But then there are creatures which, like maggots, can only exist in a corruption of their own creation. Addison has mildly styled them "the lice which lurk in the locks of literature."

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It is too late in the day to attempt the destruction of Burns' reputation. His strength, his directness, his vividness, his easy certainty, his divination, passion, wit, pathos, and lightness of touch have not only made him the greatest poet and satirist of his country; they have also raised him to a place of high honor among the few great song-writers of the world. Even Henley styles him: 'The most exquisite artist in folk-song the world has ever seen,'—and again: 'No such artist in folk-song has ever



worked in literature. . . . Under his hand a patch-work of catch-words became a living song.' Of his laurels, the carping of an obscure unknown cannot rob him—here or elsewhere. 'He is secure,' says Henley, 'even outside the Vernacular, of the fame of an unique artist.' But Henley is not always so fair. We have just seen that he is not above the manufacture of statements; he is more than hypercritical when he attempts to prove Burns' indebtedness in twenty instances to the Herd MS. collection—a collection which possibly the poet never saw, and probably never heard of; and of which his mode of life made a close study impossible. But despite these injustices—perhaps merely the ebullitions of a not wholly-controlled eccentricity—Henley genuinely admires Burns. His charge is that at times: "Burns did but pass the folk-song of his country through the mint of his mind, and reproduced it stamped with his image, and lettered with his superscription." In short, that Burns originated even when he remembered.

But the *Bulletin* people show no such compunction about rough-handling the artist who, according to Taine, revolutionised the world's poetic thought. No half-measures for them. They only applaud Henley when he is hypercritical or unjust. For instance, when they imagine that Henley accused Burns of borrowing a measure from Fergusson. This, the poet is usually supposed to have done when first launching forth on callow pinions into the high

atmosphere of poesy. But to his prototype—cut off before he fully flowered—the Ayrshire peasant is as the sun to a farthing rushlight. Henley's strongest indictment is that Burns lacked the power to originate a new vein of thought (*vide* Taine) a new rhythm. Has Tennyson done either? Wordsworth? Byron?—who borrowed his *ottava rima* from Italy, and the verse of Ariosto. Milton? Can it be said that there is one poet of the Victorian era, except, perhaps, Browning and Whitman, against whom the same charges could not be more forcibly laid? Most measures, if not all, are in common use; they are no man's copyright. Is there a poet, alive or dead, whose measures were all original? Burns borrowed his measures! So—and who did the man that he borrowed from, borrow from? The reply is easy: In the *Athenæum*, some years ago, Ferdinand Freiligrath, as does Henley, traced Burns' six-line-stave, built on two rhymes, from Fergusson to Ramsay, to whom it came through the black-letter broadsides from Alexander Scott and Sir Richard Maitland. Thence it was traced, past Montgomerie (of quatorzain note), to the low Latin of the monkish hymnal. But its first out-bubbling spring, so far as the authorities know, was in the *rima couée* of the Eleventh Century troubadour. And the Omniscience of the Red Page, who so kindly assists struggling authors for a cash consideration, snaps its inky fingers and joys to think that Burns stole the self-same-strain from Fergusson—Seven Centuries Later! As a matter

of fact Burns' very earliest verses were written in this stanza ere he had met Fergusson's poems, and it is said that his first model was King James' Christis Kirke on the Grene.

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I have been much awed by the keen moral susceptibility which causes the *Bulletin* to shed inky tears over the ethical bluntness which permits a Scotch poet to use in combination any two words similarly conjoined—before or since. Should this become the vogue, the Scot who wishes to remark that the sun rose will be compelled to find a new language to do it in, or he will be nailed as a plagiarist, and damned in a chorus of inconsequential snarls from the *Bulletin*—while its cover keeps on. Its struggle to convict Burns of plagiarism—a satire on its own methods—reminds me of another critic—that pillar of the kirk, Bowie Haggart in Auld Licht Idylls. Said he, without hesitation: “I am of opeenion that the works of Burns is of an immoral tendency. I have not read them mysel’, but such is my opeenion.”

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Sir Walter Scott declared that “the opening lines of Ae Fond Kiss were worth a thousand romances.” Of them, Mrs. Johnstone said: “These four lines form in themselves a complete romance—the very alpha and omega of feeling, and contain the essence of an existence of pain and pleasure distilled

into one burning drop." It is not wonderful therefore that the Purple Flunkey should be found quoting with glee this extraordinary statement from Henley's pen:—"The germ of 'Ae Fond Kiss' is found in 'The Parting Kiss' of Robert Dodsley (1703-1764), which was set by Oswald." I am not content to take this on trust; let us see. Here is Dodsley:—

One fond kiss before we part,  
 Drop a tear, and bid adieu;  
 Though we sever, my fond heart  
 Till we meet shall pant for you.

Turn from this miserable doggerel to "Burns' immortal lines"—the phrase is Henley's—and we will see what Matthew Arnold has to say of them later on:—

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!  
 Ae fareweel, and that forever!  
 Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,  
 Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

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Had we never loved sae kindly,  
 Had we never loved sae blindly,  
 Never met, or never parted—  
 We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Red Page has been prejudiced enough, silly enough to say that Burns had rarely power to elevate or inspire any but the Scotch, and them chiefly in their drunken moods, but I venture to assert that

there is not an unshaven scribe with an inky forefinger in a dingy backroom anywhere, who would not, moved by this passionate lament, rather be able to append his signature to it than to anything the *Bulletin* ever printed. But no doubt this crimson authority has classed Ae Fond Kiss either as a "Neat Vamp" or as a "Clean-Steal." It would not be hard to fitly describe him by one lurid but appropriate epithet in familiar use.

Take the following as another example of Henley's at times haggling method of handling Burns. He asserts that My Nannie, O was *perhaps* suggested by Ramsay's formal lines:—

While some for pleasure pawn their health  
 'Twixt Lais and the bagnio,  
 I'll save myself, and without stealth  
 Kiss and caress my Nannie, O!

Listen to three verses out of Burns' ten:—

Behind yon hills where Lugar flows,  
 Mang woods and mosses many, O,  
 The winter sun the day has closed,  
 And I'll awa to Nanny, O.

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Her face is fair, her heart is true;  
 As spotless as she's bonnie' O,  
 The opening gowan, wat wi dew,  
 Nae purer is than Nannie, O.

Oor auld guidman delights to view  
His sheep and kye thrive bonnie, O,  
But I'm as blithe that hauds his pleugh,  
And hae nae care but Nannie, O.

Is there any resemblance, in quality or kind, between the two sets of verses, other than in the use of three words—My Nannie, O? And these, as Cunningham points out, were used in association long before Ramsay's day.



## CHAPTER IV.

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### BURNS COMPARED WITH HIS ALLEGED SOURCES OF INSPIRATION.

It seems absurd that charges of literary larceny should be made against one who was, as Charles Whibley says : “ So prodigal of his gifts that he would send a poem to a friend and forget its existence.” Can it be imagined that a cold-blooded plagiarist would write, as did Burns to Thomson, in these terms :—“ Are you not vexed to think that the men of genius who composed our fine Scottish lyrics should be unknown. It has given me many a heart-ache !” This is scarcely the language of a filcher. But the sins of the publishers have been placed on his shoulders ; the use of a mere over-word or chorus has been deemed literary burglary, and the formation of centos from widely scattered fragments—brought together to enrich Scottish literature and not for personal gain or honor—has been denounced as if it

were an infamous crime. Even if all were true that has been said about Burns by the *Bulletin*, it might have been considered as a circumstance of extenuation that death snatched him away in his thirty-seventh year ere he had time to weed out or revise his weaker works, to label more definitely his borrowings, to brand more indelibly his own creations. Yet without any definite evidence, on mere suspicions founded on prejudice and never verified, the *Bulletin's* reviewer has asserted, with all the dogmatic downrightness of an infallible oracle, that;—

“In the clean-steal category are ‘The Primrose’ (ravished from Thomas Carew—Burns himself calls it ‘an old English song which I daresay is but little known’—wherefore he ravished); Bonnie Dundee; Whistle and I’ll come to You, My Lad; Landlady count the Lawin; Laddie, Lie Near Me; We’re a’ Noddin’; and some two score more. In these cases, if Burns has not annexed the whole of his originals, he has annexed so much of idea, phrase and rhythm that the song would be nothing without them.”

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It is interesting to observe the lengths to which unscrupulous prejudice will go. The Primrose was *collected* for Thomson—who just then wanted words set to certain old tunes—by Burns. He wrote thus to him: “For ‘Todlin’ Hame (a Scots tune of ancient origin); take the following old English song, which



I daresay is but little known. N.B.—I have altered it a little.” (He did not even Scotticise it.) I know no better proof of the malignity of the *Bulletin's* bludgeoner. Reviewing Henley's book; basing his attacks presumably on evidence therein, he accuses the poet of ‘clean-stealing’ Carew's poem. Let me hoist him with a quotation from Henley! On page 104 of volume iv. this editor says:—“Burns did but ply his trade with a view to filling a page in Thomson's book; and as he claimed not the maker's honors but was content with the vamer's, there is no more to be said about the matter, so far as he is concerned. But one can't help wishing that he had lived to curb the enthusiasm of certain of his commentators.” It is never safe to review a book after merely smelling the paper-knife! I have read many editions of Burns and have never yet met *The Primrose* in any. The commentator alluded to by Henley is Scott Douglas—a very incompetent literary authority, who published a very heterogeneous edition of the poet; a menace, from the rubbish included, to his reputation. The manner by which songs came to be attributed to Burns which he never wrote and never claimed, is easily traced. Creech, Currie, Cunningham, and others, printed his *collections* for music together with his accompanying letters, which gave full information concerning them. Some later publishers retained some of the songs, and condensed the letters into foot-notes. Two or three still later publishers, either ignorant or careless, kept one or

two songs and dropped their foot-notes. But to blame the poet for what took place fifty or a hundred years after his death, is cruel, cowardly, and contemptible.

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The so-called 'clean-steal' of Whistle and I'll come to you, my Lad, lies chiefly in an adaptation of its chorus from that of an old Scotch song. Cunningham somewhere says—"Burns' version of this lyric is founded on an old fragment, but he poured his own feeling and fancy so happily through the whole, that not a single line remains entire, nor can the new be pronounced free of the language of the older minstrel." Burns acknowledged his debt, and Cunningham proclaimed the acknowledgment. Yet Burns is styled a thief, and the Scotch are accused of ignorantly participating in the robbery—of reset after the theft. But let us make comparison of the evidence, supplied by Henley, on which the charge of theft is founded.

#### BEFORE BURNS.

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Peggy's a maid both kind and fair,  
And Peggy is dear to Johnny,  
And none in all Scotland here and there,  
None is so blithe and bonnie.  
And Peggy has vow'd their love to own.  
O whistle my love and I'll come down  
And gang to the kirk wi' Johnnie.  
—*From Whistle and I'll come down.*

Whistle and I'll cum to ye, my lad !  
 Whistle and I'll cum to ye, my lad !  
 Gin father and mither and a' should gae mad,  
 Whistle and I'll come to ye, my lad !  
 —*From song in Herd MS.*

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### AFTER BURNS.

O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad ;  
 O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad ;  
 Tho' faither and mither and a' should gae mad,  
 O whistle, and I'll come to you, my lad.

But warily tent, when ye come to court me,  
 And comena unless the back-yett be a-jee ;  
 Syne up the back-stile, and let naebody see,  
 And come as ye werena comin to me.

At kirk, or at market, whene'er ye meet me,  
 Gang by me as tho' that ye carena' a flee ;  
 But steal me a blink o' your bonnie black e'e  
 Yet look as ye werena lookin at me.

Aye vow and protest that ye carena for me,  
 And whiles ye may lichtly my beauty a wee ;  
 But court na anither, tho' jokin' ye be,  
 For fear that she wile your fancy frae me.

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Burns laid no claim to Bonnie Dundee. The version now most popular—it begins 'To the Lords of Convention, 'twas Claverhouse spoke'—is by Sir Walter Scott. In a letter to Cleghorn, Burns says—'You will see by the above that I have added a stanza to Bonnie Dundee.' This was the one

beginning—‘ My blessin’s on thy sweet wee lippie.’ He used infinitely less of the various editions in circulation than did Scott, who has taken the whole chorus—holus-bolus. But Burns, who died before his sun had attained its meridian, leaving his poetical affairs in confusion, is styled a thief, though his borrowings were less and his acknowledgments no less ample than were those of the later poet, who goes scot-free of abuse.

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With the MS. of Landlady, count the Lawin’ Burns acknowledged his indebtedness to some old songs. Let me quote for the purpose of comparison.

#### BEFORE BURNS.

Here’s to the King,  
Ye ken wha I méan,  
And to ilka honest boy,  
That will do it again.

—*Jacobite Song.*

When you hear the pipe soun’s  
Tuittie tattie to the drums,  
Up your swords and down your guns,  
And at the louns again.

—*Old Ballad.*

Every day my wife tells me  
That ale and brandy will ruin me ;  
But if gude liquor be my dead,  
This shall be written on my head.  
Landlady, count the lawin’.

—*From Burns’ MS.*

AFTER BURNS.

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Landlady, count the lawin'  
 The day is near the dawin :  
 Ye're a blin' drunk, boys,  
 And I'm but jolly fou.  
 Hey tutti, taiti,  
 How tutti, taiti—  
 Hey tutti, taiti,  
 Wha's fu noo ?

Cog, an' ye were aye fou,  
 Cog, an' ye were aye fou,  
 I wad sit and sing to you,  
 If ye were aye fou.

Weel may ye a' be !  
 Ill may ye never see !  
 God bless the king, boys,  
 And the companie !

It is positively astounding that Henley should call Burns' third verse a variation of the Jacobite song ; only a violent mental squint enables the *Bulletin* to style the song a clean-steal.

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It will surprise no one who has followed me thus far to learn that Burns laid no claim to Laddie, lie Near Me. He was asked to set words to the air of a song so named, and refused on the grounds that he

did not know the tune. Henley, however, is of opinion that Burns amended and condensed the original for Thomson. But in his Remarks on Scottish Song—appended first to Cromek's edition of his verses, and included in many modern editions of Burns' works—Burns says: 'This song is by Blacklock.' (Dr. Thos. Blacklock was the blind poet mentioned by Dr. Samuel Johnson in a letter to Mrs. Thrale, dated from Edinburgh, Aug. 1773.) Is this the conduct of a 'Clean-Stealer'? It is a safe thing to libel a man dead for over 100 years! By the way, for the information of ignorant and malicious critics, I may further say that Burns' Remarks on Scottish Song were written by him in an interleaved copy of the first four volumes of Johnson's Musical Museum. Thence they were transcribed by Cromek, and published in his Reliques of Burns. They are now to be found in the Chandos and other modern editions of the Scottish poet's works.

As for We're a' Noddin', Burns supplied it to Johnson's Musical Museum, and the note therein says "corrected by Burns." As Burns never claimed the song—the bulk is his, nevertheless—the *Bulletin's* Red Page has no reason for saying that he stole it. Concerning all those songs which the *Bulletin* vulgarly and incorrectly styles "Clean-steals," Henley's description is that Burns had a lead. The contrast between the fairly-instructed editor and his biased quite ignorant reviewer is marked.

But my readers may now compare the song as it was when Burns found it with its after condition:—

BEFORE BURNS.

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Cats like milk, and dogs like broo,  
Lads like lassies, and lassies lads too;  
And they're a' nodding, nidding, nidding, nodding,  
They're a nodding at oor house at hame.

Kate sits i' the neuk supping hen-broo,  
Deil take Kate if she does not know it too;  
And they're a' nodding, nidding, &c.

\* \* \* \*

AFTER BURNS.

CHORUS.

We're a' noddin,  
Nid, nid, noddin,  
We're a' noddin  
At oor hoose at hame.

' Guid e'en to ye Kimmer,  
And how do ye do ? '  
' Hicup', quo Kimmer,  
' The better that I'm fou ! '  
We're a noddin, &c.

Kate sits i' the neuk,  
Suppin' hen-broo,  
Deil tak Kate  
An she be na noddin too !  
An we're a', &c.

‘ Hoo’s a’ wi ye, Kimmer ?  
 And how do you fare ? ’  
 ‘ A pint o’ the best o’t,  
 An’ twa pints mair ’ !  
 An we’re a’, &c.

‘ Hoo’s a’ wi ye, Kimmer ?  
 And how div ye thrive ?  
 How many bairns hae ye ? ’  
 Quo Kimmer, ‘ I hae five.’  
 An we’re a’, &c.

‘ Are they a’ Johnnie’s ?  
 ‘ She : ‘ Atweel na ;  
 Twa o’ them were gotten  
 When Johnnie was awa ! ’  
 An we’re a’, &c.

Cats like milk  
 And dogs like broo :  
 Lads like lassies weel,  
 And lassies lads too.  
 We’re a’ noddin,  
 Nid, nid, noddin,  
 We’re a’ noddin  
 At oor hoose at hame.

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Continuing his tortuous course the *Bulletin's* red-handed murderer of reputation ingeniously said that : “ Burns never claimed credit for many of the verses which his eulogists attribute to him. If he did, he might have claimed credit for a Clean-Steal like the ‘ Dusty Miller.’ ”



If this slip-shod stuff has any meaning, it is that Burns did not use *The Dusty Miller* as his own. Nevertheless, it is styled a 'Clean-Steal.' What next? The facts are that Burns remodelled the first stanza of the 'Miller,' and added thereon an entirely new verse. He did *not* sign it, and, in the notes to his poems, this information was given. Consequently, only the most superficial of Burns' admirers could view the *Dusty Miller* as 'an egg of genius that only Burns' mind could lay,' and only the most malevolent of his critics could dub it a 'Clean-Steal.' There are minds which lay other varieties of egg—the egg of innuendo, of misrepresentation, of suppression, of absolute untruth!

#### BEFORE BURNS.

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O, the Dusty Miller, O the Dusty Miller,  
 Dusty was his coat, Dusty was his cullour;  
 Dusty was the kiss I got frae the Miller!  
 Oh, the Dusty Miller wi' the dusty coat,  
 He will spend a shilling ere he win a groat.

O' the Dusty Miller.

—*Herd, MS.*

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#### AFTER BURNS.

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Hey the dusty miller  
 And his dusty coat!  
 He will spend a shilling  
 Or he win a groat.  
 Dusty was the coat,  
 Dusty was the colour,  
 Dusty was the kiss  
 That I got frae the miller!

Hey the dusty miller  
 And his dusty sack !  
 Leeze me on the calling  
 Fills the dusty peck !  
 Fills the dusty peck,  
 Brings the dusty siller !  
 I wad gie my coatie  
 For the dusty miller.

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Still further urging on his wild career, the *Bulletin's* Red Page asserted that:—"The two best lines in Scots Wha Hae are not Burns'; Auld Lang Syne is not Burns'; Comin' Thro' the Rye is not Burns'; My Love is Like the Red, Red Rose is not Burns'."

Concerning this magnificent war-song, which, says Carlyle, "Should be sung with the throat of the whirlwind," Burns makes this statement:—"I have borrowed the last stanza from the common-stall edition of Wallace—

A false usurper sinks in every foe,  
 And Liberty returns with every blow.

And no one has been able to show his further indebtedness. But here is the chant, as Burns left it:—

Scots, wha hae wi' WALLACE bled,  
 Scots, wham BRUCE has aften led;  
 Welcome to your gory bed,  
 Or to Victorie !

Now's the day, and now's the hour ;  
 See the front of battle lower ;  
 See approach proud Edward's power—  
     Chains and Slaverie !

Wha will be a traitor knave ?  
 Wha wad fill a coward's grave ?  
 Wha sae base as be a slave ?  
     Let him turn and flee ?

Wha for Scotland's King and Law,  
 Freedom's sword will strongly draw ?  
 FREEMAN stand, or FREEMAN fa'  
     Let him on wi' me !

By oppression's woes and pains !  
 By your Sons in servile chains !  
 We will drain our dearest veins,  
     But they shall be free !

Lay the prond usurpers low !  
 Tyrants fall in every foe !  
 LIBERTY's in every blow !  
     Let us do, or dee !

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The *Bulletin* fully quoted *My Love is Like* in order to prove that Burns had no fire of his own, and filched the poetic flame. In Cunningham's and many other editions it is stated that this was a paraphrase of an old Nithsdale song. The first verse was little improved by Burns ; the two next quoted first appeared, it is said, in a chap-book (1792). If the poet had no hand in putting them there ; if they were not " cribbed " from him, as were many other

songs by the chapmen of his generation and the next; if they were not of the bogus Burns' "originals" then so numerous in process of manufacture; then only the verse beginning *As fair art Thou, My Bonnie Lass*, can be fairly attributed to him. The ideas, however, of the quoted verses were like shifting sands—always changing in form, quantity and place, but Burns' patchwork lives as he left it always, never as he found it, and Henley is forced to style *My Luvie is Like*, a "mosaic of rather beggarly scraps of verse, . . . . exquisitely done, of course." That can be no clean-steal which Burns never claimed; at most, it is a vamp. Even so, is there to be no admiration, nothing but abuse, for the man who, from some "beggarly scraps" blown hither and thither by the four winds of heaven, wove an exquisite song—perfect in pattern and full of harmony? Let us compare:—

#### BEFORE BURNS.

Her cheeks are like the roses  
That blossom fresh in June,  
O, she's like a new-strung instrument  
That's newly put in tune.

—*From a black letter ballad, "The Wanton Wife of Castle Gate,"*

\* \* \* \*

The seas they shall run dry,  
And rocks melt into sands;  
Then I'll love you still, my dear,  
When all those things are done. . . .

Fare you well, my own true love,  
And fare you well for a while,  
And I will be sure to return back again,  
If I go ten thousand mile.

—*Chapbook of 1792.*

\* \* \* \*

The Day shall turn to Night, dear Love,  
And the Rocks melt with the Sun,  
Before that I prove false to thee,  
Before my life be gone, dear Love,  
Before my Life be gone.

—*From the Loyal Lover's Promise.*

\* \* \* \*

### BURNS.

---

O, my luve is like a red, red rose,  
That's newly sprung in June.  
O, my luve is like the melodie,  
That's sweetly play'd in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luve am I,  
And I will luve thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi' the sun.  
And I will luve thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o' life shall run.

Now fare thee weel, my only luve,  
And fare thee weel a while !  
And I will come again, my luve,  
Tho' it were ten thousand mile !

Henley does not quote anything which remotely resembles Comin' thro' the Rye as a probable source of inspiration. The words "And I led her into the Rye," which occur in a filthy English ballad, are all he brings forward. Cunningham says: "Burns took the old strain . . . thrashed some of the loose chaff from about it, and sent it to the *Museum*." He quotes a verse of the 'old strain,' whose style, and particularly its use of the word 'gloom,' leads me to think it post-dates Burns. No evidence exists to justify the assertion that Comin' thro' the Rye is not Burns'. Nevertheless it is rarely attributed to him and as seldom published with his works.

#### BURNS.

---

O, Jenny's a' weet, puir body,  
Jenny's seldom dry;  
She draigl't a' her petticoatie,  
Comin' thro' the rye!

Comin' thro' the rye, puir body,  
Comin' thro' the rye,  
She draigl't a' her petticoatie,  
Comin thro' the rye!

Gin a body meet a body  
Comin' thro' the rye,  
Gin a body kiss a body,  
Need a body cry?

Gin a body meet a body  
Comin' thro' the glen,  
Gin a body kiss a body  
Need the warld ken?

Gin a body meet a body  
 Comin' frae the well,  
 Gin a body court a body,  
 Need a body tell?

Ilka lassie has her lad-lie,  
 Nane they sae hae I,  
 But a' the lads they lo'e me weel  
 An' nane the waur am I.

Henley's notes on Auld Lang Syne are but little more complete than those of Cunningham, Creech, or Currie. In styling this a "derived song" the *Bulletin* was right. When the *Bulletin* said it was *not* Burns' song, then, however, it spoke in error and contradicted its prior assertion. Four of the five verses are wholly his; the first verse and chorus—inspired, without doubt, by the lines now quoted—are immeasurably superior to the originals. In fact, only an enthusiast, competent to see latent possibilities, could write, as did Burns to Mrs. Dunlop:—"Light lie the turf on the breast of the heaven-inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment." Of course, it may be that Burns, like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, in this case as in others manufactured originals in order to get a better hearing for his own verses.

## BEFORE BURNS.

Should old acquaintance be forgot,  
 And never thought upon,  
 'The Flames of Love extinguished  
 And freely past and gone ?  
 Is thy kind Heart now grown so cold  
 In that Loving Breast of thine,  
 That thou can'st never once reflect  
 On Old-long-syne ?

## CHORUS.

On old long syne,  
 On old long syne, my jo,  
 On old long syne :  
 That thou can'st never once reflect  
 On old long syne.

— *Anonymous Jacobite Fragment.*

## BURNS.

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
 An' never brought to min' ?  
 Should auld acquaintance be forgot  
 An' days o' auld lang syne ?

We twa hae run about the braes,  
 And pu'd the gowans fine ;  
 But we've wandered mony a weary fit  
 Since days o' auld lang syne.

We twa hae paidl't in the burn,  
 From morning sun till dine ;  
 But seas between us braid hae roared  
 Since days o' auld lang syne,



Sae here's a hand, my trusty frien',  
And gie's a hand o' thine ;  
And we'll tak a richt guid willie-waught  
For days o' auld lang syne.

And surely you'll be your pint-stoup ?  
As surely I'll be mine ;  
And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet  
For days o' auld lang syne.

CHORUS.

For auld lang syne, my dear,  
For auld lang syne,  
We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,  
For auld lang syne.

One pities the unfortunate bigot whose prejudice drives him to censure Burns for turning out work of this class. What an immeasurable quantity of good feeling it has promoted throughout the world !

\* \* \* \*

Following up his trail of discontent and disapproval, the bilious critic is found quoting Aye Waukin as an example of the old Ballad diamond. Reference will show that his case is insupportable. Of its sixteen lines at least twelve—according to Henley (who styles it a ‘ masterpiece by Burns ’) and by general consent—are Burns’ own. The lines juxtaposed by the *Bulletin* to Aye Waukin—When Braving Angry Winter’s Storms—as an example of the Burns’ paste,

are in his very worst style. It is palpably untrue that it is his 'typical Very Own.' He says himself : 'These English songs gravel me to death. I have not the command of the language that I have of my native tongue. In fact, I think that my ideas are more barren in English than Scottish.' The *Bulletin's* devices for the discrediting of Burns are certainly ingenious. Are they honest? Here is the original stone in the rough and the diamond of Burns' polishing.

#### BEFORE BURNS.

---

O wat, wat,  
 O wat and weary !  
 Sleep I can get nane  
 For thinkin' on my Deary !  
 A' the nicht I wake,  
 A' the day I weary,  
 Sleep I can get nane  
 For thinkin' on my Deary !

—*Herd, M. S.*

#### BURNS.

---

Ay waukin, O,  
 Waukin still and weary ;  
 Sleep I can get nane  
 For thinking on my dearie

Simmer's a pleasant time :  
 Flowers of every colour,  
 The water runs ower the heugh,  
 And I long for my lover,

When I sleep I dream,  
 When I wauk I'm eerie,  
 Sleep I can get nane  
 For thinkin' on my dearie.

Lanely night comes on,  
 A' the lave are sleepin,  
 I think on my bonnie lad,  
 And bleer my een wi' greetin.

Aye waukin', O,  
 Waukin still an' weary ;  
 Sleep I can get nane  
 For thinkin' o' my dearie.

\* \* \* \*

The *Bulletin's* Red Page also stated that :—‘ The clean-steal class slides imperceptibly into the neat vamp, in which Burns contributes so much to the construction that the product is practically a new song.’ Nevertheless, a little further on it insinuated that the public, and especially ‘ the average Scotchman,’ have been deceived too long by a reputation which is ‘ legendary and Scottish ;’ and throughout the pervading idea is that Burns should be expurgated of the Neat-Vamps (the practically new songs) as well as the Clean-Steals.

Another contradiction : In one place the *Bulletin* said that Burns is credited with 108 songs which are neat-vamps ; further down it credited him with 108 Neat-Vamps and Derivatives when bunched together. Starting out to take away a man's reputation, some appearance of accuracy should have been

preserved. The *Bulletin* also asserted that among the vamps must be included 'The Birks of Aberfeldie, Macpherson's Farewell, For our Rightful King, The Siller Tassie, John Anderson, My Jo, and O were My Love. The man who would call The Birks of Aberfeldy a vamp is either cursed with literary opthalmia or is guilty of deliberate false testimony. It has five verses—all Burns' very own, and he only vamped the chorus from that of an old song. Therein it ran thus—

‘O bonnie lassie, wilt thou go  
To the birks of Abergeldy?’

Therefore, the extent of Burns' indebtedness is two lines of very matter-of-fact entreaty. Further, the chorus has had so little influence on Burns' song as not to qualify it for the derivative class.

\* \* \* \*

Of the 24 lines that make up Macpherson's Lament, three are borrowed, but none of the others, in spirit or in language, owe anything to the old ballad. My readers can draw their own conclusions from comparison.

#### BEFORE BURNS.

---

I spent my time in rioting,  
Debauched my health and strength;  
I pillaged, plundered, murdered,  
But now, alas! at length  
I'm brought to punishment condign;  
Pale death draws near to me;

The end I ever did project,  
 To hang upon a tree.  
 Then wantonly and rantingly  
 I am resolved to die ;  
 And with undaunted courage I  
 Shall mount this fatal tree.

— *Captain Johnston's Farewell.*

# BURNS.

Farewell, ye dungeons dark and strong  
 The wretch's destinie ;  
 Macpherson's time will not be long  
 On yonder gallows-tree.

# CHORUS.

Sae rantingly, sae rantingly,  
 Sae dauntingly gaed he ;  
 He played a spring and danced it round,  
 Beneath the gallows-tree.

Oh ! what is death but parting breath ?  
 On many a bloody plain  
 I've dared his face, and in this place  
 I scorn him yet again !

Untie these bands from off my hands  
 And bring to me my sword !  
 And there's no a man in all Scotland  
 But I'll have him at a word.

I've lived a life of sturt and strife ;  
 I die by treachery :  
 It burns my heart I must depart  
 And not avenged be.

Now farewell light, thou sunshine bright,  
 And all beneath the sky !  
 May coward shame disdain his name,  
 The wretch that dare not die !

\*             \*             \*             \*

Henley says of A ' for our Rightful King, that Buchan, who attributed it to Captain Ogilvie, was ' still bent on fathering everything on somebody'—a line the *Bulletin* might commit to memory. The first and last verses of *Mally Stewart*—an alleged blackletter ballad of which the earliest copy extant bears as date 1807—are the only verses that in any way resemble Burns' song, which dates in publication from 1796. The Demon Lover has two lines which resemble those now quoted. Of Burns' 30 lines, none owe anything to Mally Stewart, except his third verse, which has been taken almost verbatim, and, says Henley, 'set in a jewel of Burnsian gold.' Of the whole song, Henley goes on to say that Burns touched his borrowing to issues as fine as the Romantic Lyre has to show.'

#### BEFORE BURNS.

MALLY STEWART.

(1)

The cold winter is past and gone, and now comes in the Spring,  
 And I am one of the King's Life-Guards, and must go fight  
     for my King,  
         My dear,  
 I must go light for my King.

IX.

The trooper turned himself about all on the Irish shore,  
He has given the bridle reins a shake, saying adieu for ever-  
more

My dear,

Adieu for evermore!

AFTER BURNS.

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It was a' for our rightfu' King  
We left fair Scotland's strand .  
It was a' for our rightfu' King,  
We e'er saw Irish land,  
My dear—  
We e'er saw Irish land.

Now a' is done that men can do,  
And a' is done in vain,  
My Love and Native Land farewell,  
For I maun cross the main,  
My dear—  
For I maun cross the main,

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He turned him right and round about  
Upon the Irish shore  
And gave his bridle-reins a shake,  
With adieu for evermore,  
My dear—  
And adieu for evermore.

The sodger frae the war returns,  
The sailor frae the main,  
But I hae parted frae my love  
Never to meet again,  
My dear—  
Never to meet again.

When day is gone and night is come,  
 And a' folk bound to sleep,  
 I think on him that's far awa  
 The lee-lang nicht and weep,  
 My dear—  
 The lee-tang nicht and weep.

*It is my opinion that Mally Stewart was partly stolen from Burns rather than that Burns borrowed from Mally Stewart.*

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Usually known as My Bonnie Mary, The Siller Tassie owes 14 or 15 of its 16 lines to Burns. The poet told the publisher that he took the first half-stanza from an old ballad. The borrowed lines or line hardly contain the motive of the song—which never can be honestly called a vamp.

#### BEFORE BURNS.

Go fetch to me a pint of wine,  
 Go fill it to the Brim;  
 That I may drink my gude Lord's health,  
 Tho' Errol be his name.

#### BURNS.

Gae bring to me a pint o' wine,  
 An' fill it in a siller tassie;  
 That I may drink before I go,  
 A service to my bonnie lassie.  
 My boat rocks at the pier of Leith;  
 Fu' loud the wind blaws frae the ferry;  
 The ship rides by North Berwick law,  
 An' I maun leave my bonnie Mary.



The trumpets sound, the banners fly,  
 The glittering spears are ranked and ready ;  
 The shouts o' war are heard afar,  
 The battle closes thick and bloody.  
 But it's no the roar o' sea or shore  
 Wad make me langer wish to tarry ;  
 Nor shout o' war that's heard afar,  
 It's leavin' thee, my bonnie Mary.

Burns never claimed *O were my Love* ; which the *Bulletin* placed in its list of his vamps. Nor is it a vamp. In the Creech edition it has been set forth for over one hundred years, over Burns' signature, that only a portion of this lovely song was his ; ' the average Scotchman ' has been supplied for about 105 years with reliable information as to what is Burns' and what is not. In a letter to Thomson, it is stated by Burns that, in order to eke out a song to the air Hughie Graham, he had added eight lines to an ' inexpressibly beautiful fragment ' taken from Witherspoon's *Scottish Collection*. The eight lines beginning ' Oh, were my Love yon Lilac Fair ' are wholly Burns' ; the eight lines which commence ' Oh, gin my Love were yon Red Rose, ' belong to some gifted Unknown whose muse Burns has slightly assisted.

IMPROVED BY BURNS.

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O gin my love were yon red rose  
 That grows upon the castle wa',  
 And I mysel' a drap o' dew.  
 Into her bonnie breast to fa'!  
 Oh, there, beyond expression blest,  
 I'd feast on beauty a' the night;  
 Seal'd on her silk-saft faulds to rest  
 Till fley'd awa' by Phœbus' light.

BURNS VERY OWN.

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O were my love yon lilac fair,  
 Wi' purple blossoms to the spring;  
 And I, a bird to shelter there,  
 When weared on my little wing;  
 How I wad mourn, when it was torn  
 By Autumn wild and Winter rude!  
 But I wad sing on wanton wing,  
 When youthfu' May its bloom renewed.

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Of John Anderson, My Jo, 16 lines are printed in the ordinary editions, but there are eight others in existence which Burns left out because they had not the delicate pathos of the lines retained. As a matter of fact, Burns borrowed nothing from the gone-before but the refrain of five words — 'John Anderson, My Jo, John,' and if the verses in the *Merry Muses*, as some most shrewdly suspect, were his own

parody of his own song, then he borrowed nothing. So, where the vamp theory has a rightful footing none but a Red Page may say. Is the Page too Red to raise a blush?

John Anderson, my Jo, John,  
 I wonder what you mean,  
 To rise so soon in the morning,  
 And sit up so late at e'en;  
 You'll blear out your eyn, John,  
 And why will you do so?  
 Come sooner to your bed at e'en,  
 John Anderson, my Jo.

*— From the Merry Muses of Caledonia*

John Anderson, my Jo  
 Cum in as ye gae by,  
 And ye sall get a sheip's head  
 Weel baken in a pye;  
 Weel baken in a pye,  
 And a haggis in a pat,  
 John Anderson, my Jo,  
 Cum in and ye'se get that.

*— By John Anderson, Town-piper, Kelso.*

## BURNS.

John Anderson, my Jo, John,  
 When we were first acquaint,  
 Your locks were like the raven,  
 Your bonnie brow was brent;  
 But now your brow is beld, John,  
 Your locks are like the snaw;  
 But blessings on your frosty pow,  
 John Anderson, my Jo.

John Anderson my Jo, John,  
We clamb the hill thegither ;  
And mony a canty day, John,  
We've had wi' ane anither :  
Now we maun totter down, John,  
But hand in hand we'll go,  
And sleep thegither at the foot,  
John Anderson, my Jo.

So much for the direct charges !



## CHAPTER V.

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### THE HODMAN ON THE WALL.

The *Bulletin's* alleged review of the Centenary Burns teemed with contradictions. In several places the Scotch were damned as an unpoetical and unimaginative race—this, in order to discredit the Burns of whom they think so much. In another place, again for the purpose of discrediting Burns, the ancient Scotch-song writers were thus lauded :—

The sincerity, the ring, the intensity (either of humour or pathos), the charm and the power, these are always the property of the rough, so-joyous, so-sad old rhymers (*Scotch*) from whom the song Burns borrowed. Often his sympathy gave their work a better form, but theirs was the living fire. . . . The divine fire that those earlier Titans (*Scotch*) stole from Heaven.

These are peculiar terms to use in describing an unpoetical race! But there are other contradictions. In several instances, Henley is congratulated on his

production of a book whose revelations unmask the impostor who has been so long masquerading as a poet. But in another place it is calmly stated that "It has always been known or guessed that Burns was scarcely ever a completely original writer." One statement negatives the other; neither is correct. Henley's so-called revelations have been common property for over a century. In classic *Bulletin* phrase, he 'filched them from current literature.'

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I had made a random guess that probably but one-third of the published editions of Burns contained copious notes. The *Bulletin's* reviewer quibbled therefrom that the alleged ignorance of the average Scot of Burns' alleged plagiarisms is due to the noteless two thirds. 'This is lovely, coming from one who throughout eight columns revelled in the idea that Henley's edition—published at two guineas net—would constitute a revelation to the Scottish nation and would obliterate 'The conception of Burns which is legendary and Scottish.' The Page gloated over the disillusionment this fatuous race was about to experience, and said, 'One can conceive the horror of the foolish people who have transformed Burns into a sort of Scottish Mumbo-Jumbo.' Therein, he betrayed his belief that the 'foolish people'—foolish because they admire Burns—who were inaccessible to former numberless annotated editions were suddenly to be shown the error of their

ways by Henley at forty-two shillings per shock! This the sort of thing you get from the critic (?) who starts with a preconceived idea and endeavours to suppress or distort every fact that does not agree with it.

Let me parallel a few more Red Page contradictions:—

By dint of his versatile	Burns fits his unimaginative
energy Burns summed up and	countrymen and they fit him
excelled the achievements of a	He inspires a Scotchman less
dozen poets, on a dozen lines.	because he is a poet than be-
. . . Other poets show dif-	cause he is Scotch. . . .
ferent sides of the Scottish	Burns is a mere tinker, vam-
nation; Burns is like Shakes-	per and mender, and little
peare—he comprehends all	more. . . . Burns' lack
sides. His universal vitality	of imagination kept him from
dings his poems into the uni-	soaring far from his facts—he
versal mind. The early Burns	is always a tethered goat
survives as proverbs survive—	grazing in an objective circle.
because his language is a pithy,	The later Burns survives in
vigorous concentration of what	virtue of the ability with which
every Scotsman thinks and	he milked other people's cows
feels, and continually needs	into his own bucket. . . .
and wishes to express. . . .	The average Scot is not im-
No Scotch poet approaches	pressed by poetry.
Burns as a satirist. . . Burns'	
Doric stirs the Scotchman's	
soul—or brain rather.	

Certainly no one will ever accuse the *Bulletin's* reviewer of inability to soar far from his facts; or, indeed, out of sight of them. Albeit not tethered, in this matter he assumes somewhat the complexion of a goat.

Loath to begin, my case is so strong that I am loath to leave off, but let me say of the New Cult in Criticism that it is unhealthy; it reeks of miserable conceits, and savors of cant and trickery. It presents to us the statement that Burns had too healthy a body to be a first-class poet—his health was ruined by overwork as a growing boy—and that good writing is the product of a diseased brain and a disordered liver. I will admit that this hypothesis may account for most of the remarkably good writing seen on the Red Page, but it is not borne out by general results. This brings me to an extraordinary statement, attributed to Henley by the *Bulletin*, but which I have not encountered myself, and which that journal loudly applauds:—

A lyrical idea—by which I mean a rhythm, a burden, and a drift—once found, the song writes itself. It writes itself easily or with difficulty, it writes itself well or ill, but in the end it writes itself.

Either Mr. Henley is misquoted or else he easily writes himself down an ass. The difference between the ‘lyrical idea’ which writes songs easily and well, and the ‘lyrical idea’ which writes songs with difficulty and ill, is to be found in the difference between the brains at the end of the respective pens. If the lyrical idea alone did the work, then the completed song founded on a lyrical idea could never, by any mischance, be ill. One thing is certain: Take the lyrical idea of any song that Burns ever wrote of any value and place it in the hands of Henley, and



all the *Bulletin* bards that ever spoiled clean paper, and I will engage that in everything which goes to make a lyric, Burns is easily first and the rest nowhere. The *Bulletin's* review of Henley's Burns was simply a peg on which to hang an attack on the poet and his countrymen. It was almost as unfair to Henley as it was to Burns; for there is nothing in Henley's criticisms, or notes, or alleged discoveries which warranted the unreasoning savagery of the *Bulletin's* onslaught.

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The obscure unknown who parades his little hour as Sir Oracle on the *Bulletin's* Red Page, hard-pressed for a mouse-hole of escape, driven to cover an undignified retreat from an untenable position by the dust kicked-up over non-essentials, attempted to mitigate the severity of his chastisement by quoting against me the fact that I am Scotch. While he fails to answer my arguments that can not reduce his discomfiture by one iota. But no Scot was ever less clannish than I. No Burns-worshipper, I had originally assessed him in a much lower place than had Byron, Scott, Wordsworth, Cowper, Keats, Charles Lamb, Wm. Hazlitt, Delta Moir, Campbell, Prof. Wilson, J. G. Lockhart, William Pitt, Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, Taine, Gosse, Whittier, Whitman, Ingersoll, Beecher, Auguste Angellier, Andrew Lang, Masson, Henley, Whibley, Francis Thompson, and many others, of all climes, and all creeds, superior individually—as the Himalayas to a mole-hill—in

weight and authority to my opponent. And so little thought of clan or clique have I in this matter that, had Burns not been in hand, I would have dulled a nib in defence of Tennyson. Nor is this second-hand tinker in criticism liberated by his idiotic inuendo that an inferior versifier can be no judge of poetry. If true, it is time that he, an even more miserable failure than I, ceased to sit in judgment on poets and poetry. On his own showing, a hodman, by accident on the wall, is posing as a builder. But the jibe has not only a boomerang flight, it is also untrue. Taine wisely says: "It is dangerous for an artist to be excellent in theory; the creative spirit is not consonant with the criticising spirit; he who, quietly seated on the shore, discusses and compares the waves, is hardly capable of plunging straight and boldly into the stormy sea of invention."

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My task is ended. I have, in accordance with my promise, categorically dealt with and disproved all the calumnies of *Bulletin* manufacture. To make the victory more apparent, however, the defeat more disastrous, the chain of argument more irrefragable, I will quote an opinion from every one of the great authorities above-mentioned and some others.

## CHAPTER VI.

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### THE DEAD SPEAK.

Said Byron in his letter on Pope :—

Of what order according to the poetical aristocracy are Burns' poems? There are his *opus magnum*, 'Tam O'Shanter—a tale; The Cotter's Saturday Night—a descriptive sketch; some others in the same style; the rest are songs. So much for the rank of his productions; *the rank of Burns is the very first* in his art.

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Said Sir Walter Scott :—

Notwithstanding the spirit of many of his lyrics, and the exquisite sweetness and simplicity of others, we cannot but regret that so much of Burns' time and talents were frittered away in compiling and composing for musical col-

lections. . . *No poet of our tongue has displayed higher skill in marrying melody to immortal verse.* . . . *No poet with the exception of Shakespeare ever possessed the power of exciting the most varied and discordant emotions with such swift transitions.* . . . Deeply must we regret the avocations which diverted a fancy so varied and vigorous, joined with language and expressions suited to all its changes, from leaving a more substantial monument to his own fame and the honor of his country.

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Said J. G. Lockhart :—

The Jolly Beggars, that extraordinary sketch, coupled with his later lyrics in a higher vein, is enough to show that in him we had *a master capable of placing the musical drama on a level with the loftiest of our classical poems.* The Beggar's Bush and Beggar's Opera sink into tameness in the comparison. . . Had Burns pursued that walk and poured out his stores of traditional lore, embellished with his extraordinary powers of description of all kinds, we might have had from his hand a series of national tales, uniting the quaint simplicity, sly humor, and irresistible pathos of another Chaucer, with the strong and graceful versification, and masculine wit and sense of another Dryden.

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Said Professor John Wilson — Christopher North :—

Burns is by far the greatest poet that ever sprang from the bosom of the people.

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Said William Pitt :—

I can think of no verse since Shakespeare's, which comes so sweetly and at once from Nature as does Burns'.

Said William Wordsworth :—

Burns erected a monument to Fergusson, . . because he felt he had been prematurely cut off, and that his fate bore no proportion to his deserts. . . *Burns has raised for himself a monument so conspicuous and of such imperishable materials, as to render a local fabric of stone superfluous.*

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Said William Cowper :—

I think Burns' poems on the whole a very extraordinary production. He is, I believe, the only poet these kingdoms have produced in the lower ranks of life, since Shakespeare, who need not be indebted for any part of his praise to a charitable consideration of his origin, and the disadvantages under which he has laboured.

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Said Charles Lamb :—

A predominant feature of independence impresses every page of our glorious Burns. . . In early life I had a passionate fondness for the poetry of Burns. He was the god of my idolatry.

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Said John Keats, who made a pilgrimage to his tomb :—

Burns ! with honor due,  
I oft have honored thee !

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Said Thomas Moore :—

Scots Wha Hae, in a great national crisis, would be of more avail than the eloquence of a Demosthenes. The example of Burns, in his higher inspirations, should materially elevate the character of English song-writing.

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Said William Hazlitt :—

Burns' pictures of good fellowship, of social glee, of quaint humour, are equal to anything ; they come up to

nature, and they cannot go beyond it. Burns' poetry is a very highly sublimated essence of animal existence.

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Said Dugald Stewart :—

All the faculties of Burns' mind were equally vigorous. The idea which his conversation conveyed of the powers of his mind exceeded, if possible, that which was suggested by his writings.

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Said Thomas Campbell :—

Viewing Burns merely as a poet, there is scarcely another regret, connected with his name, than that his productions, with all their merit, fall short of the talents which he possessed. . . Burns has given *dixir vitæ* to his dialect. . . He stamped the little treasure he possessed in the mintage of sovereign genius.

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Said Alexander Moir, the Delta of Blackwood's Magazine :—

*The crown that Burns won can never be removed from his head.* Much is yet left for other poets, even among that life where his spirit delighted to work ; but he has built monuments on all the high places and they who follow can only hope to leave behind them humbler memorials.

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Said Thomas Carlyle :—

Burns has in his songs a tone and words for every mood of man's heart. *It will seem a small praise if we rank him as the first of all our song-writers, for we know not where to find one worthy of being second to him. The songs of Burns are by far the best that the world has seen.* . . . We recollect no poet of Burns' susceptibility who comes before us from the first and remains with us to the last with such a total want of affectation. *He is an honest man and an honest writer.* In his suc-

cesses and his failures. in his greatness and his littleness, *he is ever clear, simple, and true, and glitters with no lustre but his own.*

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Said Matthew Arnold :—

As we draw towards the end of the 18th century, we are met by the great name of Burns. . . At moments he touches high seriousness in a profound and passionate melancholy, as in those four immortal lines taken by Byron as a motto for *The Bride of Abydos*, but which have in them a depth of poetic quality such as resides in no verse of Byron's own.

. . . When the largeness and freedom of Burns get full sweep, as in *Tam O' Shanter*, or still more in that puissant and splendid production, *The Jolly Beggars*, his world may be what it will, his poetic genius triumphs over it. *The piece is a superb poetic success: it has a breadth, truth, and power which make the famous scene in Auerbach's cellar of Goethe's Faust, seem artificial and tame beside it, and which are only matched by Shakespeare and Aristophanes.* Here, where his largeness and freedom serve him so admirably, and also in those songs and poems where to shrewdness he adds infinite archness and wit, and to benignity infinite pathos, where his manner is flawless, and a perfect poetic whole is the result—here we have the genuine Burns of whom the real estimate must be high indeed. Not a classic, but a poet with thorough truth of substance and an answering truth of style, giving us a poetry sound to the core.

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Said Taine—previously quoted :—

Burns wrote his masterpiece, *The Jolly Beggars*, like the *Gucux* of Beranger ; but how much more picturesque, varied, and powerful.

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Said Ebenezer Elliott :

The lion-hearted Burns—a Niagara from Heaven !

Sang Oliver Wendell Holmes :—

Brave singer of the coming time,  
 Sweet minstrel of the joyous present,  
 Crowned with the modest wreath of rhyme,  
 The holly leaf of Ayrshire's peasant.

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Sang Elizabeth Barrett Browning :—

Burns, with pungent passionings  
 Set in his eyes. Deep lyric springs  
 Are of the fire-mountain's issuings.

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Said Green, the historian :—

At the time of Burns' birth England was mad with  
 hatred of the Scots. When Burns died there was not a  
 Scotchman who was not proud of being a Scotchman.

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Said John G. Whittier :—

I began to read Burns and was lost in wonder. It seemed  
 as if the sky had lifted and the world widened. . . The  
 great Burns has made all the world his debtor. . . His  
 genius is so great and noble that if it has blotches they are so  
 little that I don't see them.

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Said Henry Ward Beecher :—

There was more put into the making of Burns than any  
 man of his day. His letters are as wonderful as his poems,  
 and his conversation is regarded as richer than either. I  
 would that some dainty Ariel could have waited on the in-  
 spired ploughman, and stamped into record the inexhaustible  
 flow of his wonderful and rapturous conversation. . . To-  
 day, he has made the world rich; alive he could not earn food  
 and raiment, nor control his livelihood. . . *No finer genius*  
*has ever delineated the eternal forms of Nature.* His poems are a  
 torch that never goes out to all in dark places. The nation



which reads Burns in the nursery could never have tyrants in the Parliament.

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Said Col. Robert G. Ingersoll :—

If I should give Burns the place which he is entitled to, taking into consideration what he has done for me, I should place him second, one above him and only one—Shakespeare.

. . . The name of Robert Burns can never die. He is enrolled among the immortals and will live for ever. . . *He left a legacy of riches to the whole world.* Scotland has produced the greatest and noblest of our singers—the one who gave us the sweetest and tenderest song, the best drinking song, the most beautiful love poem, a song which is the apotheosis of independence, and the grandest and noblest song of all the world.

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Said Professor Masson :—

It may be doubted whether any poet of any nation since the world began ever sank so deeply and fondly as did Burns into the memories of the people. Burns, apart from his poetry, impressed enormously by the general strength and versatility of his intellect.

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Said Robert Louis Stevenson :—

Burns is Scotland's most essentially national production.

. . . In a time when English versification was particularly stiff, lame, and feeble, and words were used with ultra-academic timidity, he wrote verses that were easy, racy, graphic, and forcible, and used language with absolute tact and courage as it seemed most fit to give a clear impression. . . . When we remember Burns' obligations to his predecessors, we must never forget his immense advances on them. . . . On his appearance, a coarse and laughing literature was touched to finer issues and learned gravity of thought and

natural pathos. . . There never was a man of letters with more absolute command of his means; we may say of him, without excess, that his style was his slave. Hence the unbroken literary quality of his pieces, which keeps him from any slip into the weariful trade of word-painting, and presents everything in a clear, continuous medium of thought.

. . . The man who had written a volume of master-pieces in six months, helped to change the course of literary history.

. . . His humour comes from him in a stream so deep and easy that I will venture to call him the best of humorous poets. He has a rugged compression, a brutal vivacity of epithet, a homely vigour, a delight in local personalities, and an interest in many sides of life that are often despised and passed over by more effete and cultured poets.

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Said Auguste Angellier—who wrote a memoir of Burns, and translated him into the French:—

Weigh his defects, his faults, as heavily as you like, the scale where lies the pure gold easily turns the balance. . . *The clay of which he was created was full of diamonds*; and his life was the proudest and one of the most valiant that any poet ever lived. . . So like was his soul to a great furnace where precious metals were molten, that it might be said he was one of Nature's noblemen.

## CHAPTER VII.

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### WHAT SAY THE LIVING ?

Says George Saintsbury :—

Burns is a great poet, and one of the greatest of poets.

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Says George W. Curtis :—

His genius flashed and blazed like a torch among tapers.

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Says James Hannay :—

Burns was not only a great poet but one of the greatest men that the race has produced.

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Says the *Athenaeum* :—

We delight in the untrammelled soarings in his native air of Burns—one of the choicest singers of all time.

Says Walt. Whitman :—

Burns remains to my heart and brain almost the tenderest, manliest, and dearest flesh-and-blood figure in all the streams and clusters of bygone poets.

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Says Andrew Lang :—

In one, Nature combined much of the music of the future, in the generous, the tender, the kindly, the homely, the impassioned Burns : *the brightest of our lyrists, the most human of our satirists, the most fervid of the fervid Scots.* . . . Burns almost always climbs by a trodden way, but his genius, like a forest fire, obliterates the traces of other and earlier footsteps.

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Says Edmund Gosse :—

Burns, one of the four great poets of the Eighteenth Century, is the incarnation of natural song, the embodiment of that which is most spontaneous, most ebullient in the lyrical poet of nature. . . . *His mode of writing is unparalleled in its easy buoyant emotion since the days of Elizabeth.* . . . The absolute supremacy of Burns is a very remarkable phenomenon. In Scottish poetry, he seems not one in a chain, but the supreme artist to whom all the others are subsidiary. . .

. . . Scotch Doric verse appears to us like a single growth, starting from the rich foliage of Dunbar and his compeers . . . only to break into the single aloe-blossom of the perfect Burns.

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Says Charles Whibley :—

*Burns wrote a dozen of the best songs that the world has heard, he brought back humour and gaiety, and freedom to an age that had forgotten them in the foolish manufacture of odes and fantasies.* . . . An immortal masterpiece of melody and observation, the squalor of *The Jolly Beggars* is

glorified by a style so little rustic that every word and every rhythm is fitted to its purpose. . . . Burns expressed in perfect verse the vague experiments of the chap-books and ballads. To say that he was a plagiarist is to misunderstand his methods. He did but seize what may be called the folk-lore of poetry, and convert it to nobler uses. The tunes, mayhap, were old, but he played them upon his richer ampler lyre, until their origin was obscured by a fresh beauty. . . . Burns, who rescued half-a-dozen measures from undeserved obscurity, is one of the few singers that the world has known. . . . He laid his hand upon whatever material he found suitable, but he himself was the first to declare his indebtedness, and the genius which transformed a hasty sketch into a marvel of music was all his own. In undertaking therefore to discover the origins of Burns, Messrs. Henley and Henderson have but completed the task indicated by himself.

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Says Francis Thompson :—

Henley has not taken from Burns, he has added to him. He has shown that many supposed "originals" were later *rifacimentos* from Burns: and, in particular that Buchan and the Ettrick Shepherd are responsible between them for numberless fabrications. As St. John gave rise to a brisk industry in forged apocalypses, so of the making of originals to Burns there was presently no end. Most of them were taken down from the lips of an old woman. Buchan, and Stenhouse, and Allan Cunningham, and Hogg—we can trust none of them; the trail of the old woman is over them all. . . . To the question whether Burns could write fine songs without another man's motif to hang them on, I think the charming songs which are pure Burns furnish an undoubted affirmative answer. . . . John Anderson has a homely pathos which stands by itself. The early Mary Morrison, together with the opening stanzas of the Siller Tassie, show possibili-

ties of a finer and more romantic sentiment which might have placed him higher as a purely original writer had he lived in another atmosphere. . . . Taking him, borrowings and all, the merit of his songs lies in the partly dramatic kind; *they display vividly and pictorially, the life of a whole peasantry as it has not been displayed in English literature.* . . . Burns, like Homer, is not merely a poet, but a literature. . . . I believe that Burns had genius, in another age and community, to be a very great poet indeed. As it is, he was the greatest poet he saw his way to be.

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Says R. H. Stoddard—the American poet—in *The Century* :—

The lyric survived. . still a voice in English verse. An immortal Voice, for when, slumbering and murmuring in its dreams, it awoke. . . it was with a start and a cry—a sweet wild cry, a deep, loud shout—the long triumphant song of the Master Singer—Burns.

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Says the New York *Herald* :—

The rich have built a monument to Burns, have given a stone to the man who cried for bread, but the people have erected his monument in their hearts, and there will live for ever, the memory

Of him who walked, in glory and in joy,  
Behind his plough upon the mountain side.

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Says Lord Rosebery :—

A peasant, born in a cottage that no sanitary inspector in these days would tolerate for a moment; struggling with desperate effort against pauperism, almost in vain; snatching at scraps of learning in the intervals of toil, as it were with

his teeth ; a heavy silent lad, proud of his ploughing. All of a sudden without preface or warning, he breaks out into exquisite song, like a nightingale from the brushwood, and continues singing as sweetly—with nightingale pauses—till he dies. A nightingale sings because he cannot help it ; he can only sing exquisitely because he knows no other. So it was with Burns. . . . I would claim that he is not only Scotland's greatest poet, but is worthy to rank among the greatest poets of the world.

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Henley's Burns was the medium by which it was sought to degrade the poet to the level of a dealer in stolen goods, or a mere mender of damaged pots, therefore this Defence may most fitly be closed by a quotation from that volume. Says Henley :—

Burns is an amazing compound of style and sentiment with gaiety and sympathy, of wit and tenderness with radiant humor and an admirable sense of art. . . . He had more genius, and genius of a finer, a rarer, and more generous quality than all his immediate predecessors put together. *He wrote masterpiece after masterpiece with a rapidity, an assurance, a command of means, a brilliancy of effect, which makes his achievement one of the most remarkable in English letters.* . . . The poet of a parish, he is the least parochial, the most broadly and genuinely human amongst the lyrists of his race. . . . He is national as no poet has ever been, and as no poet ever will be, or ever can be, again. . . . The Scotland he loved so well and took such pride in honoring, could scarce have been the Scotland she is, had he not been. . . . Burns, among the general at least, is better sung than read. But if his songs be the more national, the Poems are the greater, and it is chiefly to the Poems that Burns is indebted for his place in literature. .

Of a high courage, a proud heart, a daring mind, a matchless gift of speech, an abundance of humor, and wit and fire, he was a poet in whom were quintessential the effects and traditions of the Vernacular School. . . . In the sequel, *Burns is found to have a place of his own in the first flight of English poets after Milton, Chaucer, and Shakespeare.* . . . Burns, the amazing peasant of genius, the inspired faun, whose voice has gone ringing through the courts of Time these hundred years or more, and is far louder, far clearer now than when it first broke on the ear of man.

And here I leave the final decision with my readers.



















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